"If you find yourself defending rapists before defending victims/survivors let us tell you now that doing so demonstrates to us and others that you are choosing the side of rape and patriarchal brutalization that exists around the globe and that has been used as a weapon of colonization and repression for centuries.

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NO NEUTRALITY IN A RAPE CULTURE

OPEN LETTER TO PROGRESSIVES FROM RAPE VICTIMS/ SURVIVORS



the existence of this tendency across the political board as a reflection of the pervasive cultural subordination and hypersexualization of femininity. This cultural norm is so pervasive and insidious that many of us have at times felt we were required to provide sex to partners whenever asked. Many of us have felt during different times of our lives as though it was a necessity to be "sexual" and we have have had to reconcile that before we were aware of this reality it implicitly confounded our sex with partners – and still can from time to time.

On hopeful days we see the era of a trump presidency as a time of mass awakening. However, if your activism is limited to symbolic protest only, it is entirely useless to those that are most vulnerable to state and status-quo repression and is therefore entirely empty to us. What we are writing to you about is not a distant political issue but an abuse that pervades and shapes every community, including yours. So please, continue to be loud in your protesting of a culture and an elected official that normalizes rape. But also listen when people tell you they have been a victim to it, survived it, or whatever other narrative they feel is true for them. Be patient and let them tell you on their own terms only. Please be responsible if you know a perpetrator and discuss with the victim/survivor what might be done in your community. Be loud and listen, for all rape victims/survivors. Without a doubt, you know several.

In hopes that our strength might teach,

Some Victims/Survivors/Bad-Ass-Motherfuckers-That-Can't-Be-Broken-in-Your-Community

The idea for this letter was conceived collaboratively by rape survivors. It is intended to call attention to some of the ways in which progressives in our communities persistently protect rapists, hold victims accountable, and demand carceral solutions to sexual assault that return power to the partiarchal state. Our hope is that this letter could be: a resource for other rape victims/survivors and/or literally shown to progressives doing this (who it addresses) and/or provide some general contributions to the existing discourses on rape culture. The authors believe that rape culture pervades and shapes all culture – radical subculture not exempt – but chose to address the position of the progressive both because of the current liberal "#resist" frenzy which has opened many conversations and because in our experiences progressives have been the ones standing the most in the way of mobilizing community action aimed at holding rapists accountable.

careful or grateful that we weren't raped in "worse" ways. This abusive rhetoric places all accountability on the victim/survivor and we hear this from many people that think of themselves as progressive and against oppression. Rape across infinitely variable lines of addiction, citizenship, class, criminal status, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, mental illness, race, and religion, in the U.S. can manifest as infinitely variable traumas. Rape culture does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it a static condition that manifests or affects everyone in a uniform, generalizable way. Rape culture exists in a global war waged on feminized, marginalized, and deviant bodies. If sexual assault by a non-stranger (as in date rape) does not sound life-threatening enough to you to be considered an act of "war" then you do not know about the high risk of suicide and contracting sexually transmitted infections associated with any scenario of rape. If you find yourself defending rapists before defending victims/survivors let us tell you now that doing so demonstrates to us and others that you are choosing the side of rape and patriarchal brutalization that exists around the globe and that has been used as a weapon of colonization and repression for centuries.

On this same side are public figures from the alt-right movement who loudly deny the existence of rape culture and date rape. These trolls argue that these are fantasies made up by feminists to deprive men of their "rights" to feminine "sexuality". Narrow understandings of rape/sexual assault and a continuous prioritization of the position of the perpetrator over that of victims/survivors by progressives in our communities echo these rape-denying/pro-rape stances taken by the alt-right. We see

rape. Realizing one has been sexually assaulted is not always an instantaneous process that conveniently lends itself to the punctuality required for a police report (or, for that matter, a medical rape kit). But, the traumas we experienced accumulated and infiltrated our relationships with our bodies and our partners, to a point of suffering that eventually became unignorable.

We have experienced severe shame, blamed ourselves repeatedly, ignored feelings of discomfort and pain in our bodies and doubted the source of these sufferings. Many of us still have difficulty not periodically feeling responsible for the different situations in which we experienced manipulation, were taken advantage of, were forced to “give consent”, were in a physical position or state of intoxication in which giving consent was not possible, were talked into sex when we did not want to have it, were pestered to have unprotected sex, were touched and/or penetrated both when we said “no” or “stop” but also when we felt too stuck to say anything at all. It is still so extremely difficult for some of us to say aloud that the myriad scenarios in which we were sexually assaulted were not due to weaknesses on our part but rather a culture that entirely normalizes treating feminized people as sexual objects. We have to remind each other time and time again that we also internalize the brutalities of a social world built upon colonialism, enslavement, gendering, and rape and that we therefore must actively fight against the tendency to blame ourselves.

Self-blame is perpetuated by comments from peers and others that hint at victims/survivors needing to be more

We hear your disgust and outrage about trump and his cabinet of evils’ pro-rape and anti-choice comments. We are glad you are engaging in conversations about the realities of structural racism, xenophobia and misogyny. For many the brutalities of cisheteropatriarchy, state repression, deportation, and white supremacy have been pressing realities long before a trump presidency was even considered a possibility. We know and have known that these conditions will persist until support and defense are built within our communities. In this letter we take on your hitherto failure to address rape in ways that: hold rapists rather than victims/survivors accountable; demonstrate an actual position against rape culture; do not rely on state power and carceral punishment to take action against rapists; and that make victims/survivors feel safe.

“We” are some people who are victims/survivors of rape. The “we” of this letter does not speak for all rape victims/survivors. To attempt to speak for every person that has suffered through rape would entirely flatten the realities of experiential differences and conflate all racial and gender identities. The “we” of this letter refers to just some of many, many victims/survivors – some who together chose a narrative aimed at educating. While processing what we went through, it was for some of us easier to say we were sexually assaulted and difficult to say we were raped. For all of us, however, it is easy to call our assaulters rapists. In theory, we would opt for the usage of the term “rape” because nothing about this action is or should be called sexual. In praxis, we understand that not everyone is comfortable using this word to describe what they have been through and so we will alternate between terms –

similarly for “victim” and/or “survivor” since we don’t strongly identify with either of those terms but know their usefulness in praxis.

We have been told by the status quo, by TV shows and movies, by police, and often even by our friends and family, that what we have experienced was is not sexual assault/rape. We have been pried for details when we have unveiled these traumas to others, revealing how our interlocutors feel they must judge for themselves what happened and that it is not enough to hear us say how it felt for us. We have been told since we were children that rapists are crazed strangers that attack women walking alone at night with brute force. Statistically and experientially, these kinds of scenarios are the exception.

Sexual assault is a nauseatingly every day occurrence. More people are raped by non-strangers and by people they are know and/or are close to than by total strangers. Rape culture means that sexual violence is the norm, not a perverse act. More people we know that are feminized (either by their own choice and/or by the culture that would ascribe femininity to them) say they have been sexually assaulted/raped than not. We wonder what more information it will take for those who seem interested in opposing the dominant paradigm to actually begin to see that rape culture is everywhere around them. To make rape no longer the norm, others must begin treating it with a gravity comparable to the totally destabilizing weight it has on so many people’s lives.

We have been told by people, organizations, and businesses

in our communities that without a police report we will not be supported in holding rapists accountable or taking measures to prevent perpetrators from sexually assaulting again. What these parties seem to have no knowledge of is that, like the general public, police and courts are far from likely to come to the defense of rape victims in the majority of rape scenarios. We have been following the outrage and protesting for #JusticeForTheo regarding the rape of a young black man by four police officers with their batons and know that this horrible case is by no means exceptional or isolated.* For some, turning to police if they have been raped is not a viable option; for example going to police as an undocumented person or sex worker could put you at risk of deportation and/or arrest. Furthermore, for some of us it took days, weeks, months, years, to come to terms with something that never felt right but that we couldn’t – even for our own sake – call sexual assault or

* Though herein we focus on the overwhelming prevalence of feminized people being sexually assaulted, rape as a manifestation of patriarchy is not solely directed at those perceived and/or identifying as feminine/female/woman. The #JusticeforTheo case is one of many examples in which cis men suffer under patriarchal violence and face the risk of sexual violence as well, especially by conditions imposed by the state. We address this specific example because it is prescient and we believe it needs attention by all those concerned with social justice. There are many other examples of police being sexual assaulters, and also of police arresting sexual assault victims, threatening people engaging in illegal activity with rape or arrest, entrapping sex workers with rape, covering up rape cases, and protecting rapists. We find it necessary to address these truths about police and sexual violence as requests for police reports repeatedly come up in our communities. We believe that understanding how police and the state enforce, protect and uphold rape culture is a critical tenet to any thorough understanding that could actualize resistance against this brutal condition of this world.